



**U.S. Department of Justice**

**Stephen J. Murphy**

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**Eastern District of Michigan**



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March 23, 2006

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**EVENT: Sentencing**

**Defendant: Michael Wright and Joel Laird**

**DEFENDANTS SENTENCED ON FEDERAL NARCOTICS AND GUN CHARGES**

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A Detroit defendant was sentenced today to 420 months imprisonment for federal firearms and narcotics charges, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced. The defendant was the second person sentenced in the case.

Michael Wright, 34, of Detroit, was sentenced by United States District Judge Lawrence P. Zatkoff. Joel Laird, 31, of Detroit, received a 130 month term on March 14, 2006.

Murphy was joined in the announcement by Valerie J. Goddard, Special Agent In Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Defendants Wright and Laird were convicted after a 5 day jury trial in November, 2005.

Defendants were convicted of serious criminal charges including possession with intent to distribute crack cocaine, being convicted felons in possession of a firearm, and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. The case was prosecuted under the Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative.

Laird and Wright were arrested following the execution of a search warrant on September 14, 2004, by Detroit Police officers, Narcotics Enforcement Unit. The house where the two were arrested is known as a narcotics trafficking location. At the time of the search, Laird was found sitting at a table in the living room. Officers seized a Bryco Arms semi-automatic handgun with an obliterated serial number, loaded with 4 live rounds, and 6.48 grams of crack, from the top of the table where Laird was sitting. Officers also seized narcotics packaging, a digital scale and a laptop computer. Wright was arrested by the police officers as he ran from a bedroom. While running, Wright was observed throwing a tin can. Officers retrieved 16 bags of crack, totaling 5.58 grams from the can, and a Ruger .44 caliber firearm, loaded with 6 live rounds, from the bedroom.

Both Laird and Wright have prior felony criminal convictions. Wright was sentenced under the Career Offender provision of the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which calls for greatly enhanced sentences for defendants who have previous convictions for drug trafficking or violence.

“The Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative is intended to discourage previously convicted felons from carrying firearms, by subjecting them to lengthy federal sentences. This sentence is a prime example that felons who commit these crimes face serious consequences,” stated U.S. Attorney Murphy. “PSN cases target armed, multi-convicted felons like Laird and Wright in an effort to make our neighborhoods safer,” he added. Parole has been abolished under federal law, meaning that each of the defendants will serve the sentence imposed.

Special Agent in Charge, Valerie J. Goddard stated, “Working closely with our state and local partners, the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative will make our neighborhoods safer by keeping armed, violent felons off our streets. ATF is proud to be a partner in this important initiative.”

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Susan Gillooly and investigated by ATF Task Force Agent Steve Hassler.